THE CROATS

Fourteen centuries of perseverance



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Publisher
Croatian World Congress (CWC)
New York – Zagreb
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Printed by
stern-grafika d.o.o., Zagreb

Rulers from the national dynasty

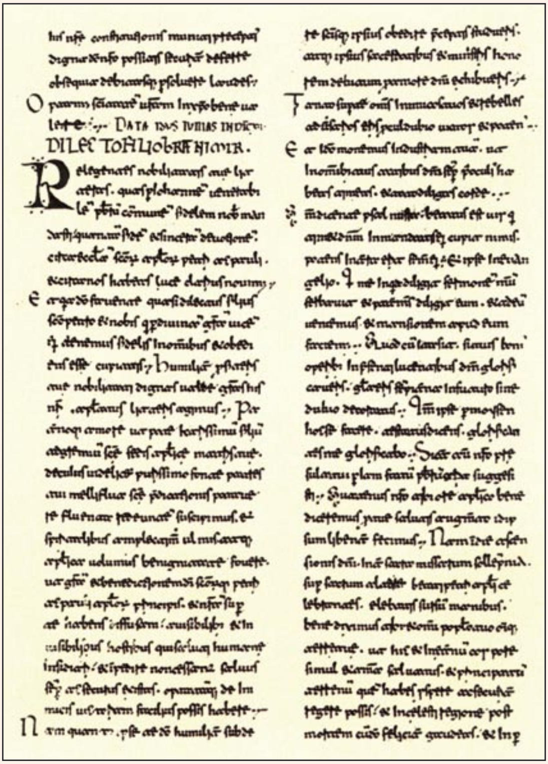
For 14 centuries, the Croats have inhabited the area they live in to this day. They first settled on the East Adriatic coast and the area encompassed by the Drina, Drava and Danube rivers in the first half of the 7th century AD, in a time of strife between the Avars and the Byzantine Empire and general tumult in Europe.

In the reign of Prince Branimir, in 879, pope John VIII, as the universal authority of the age, effectually recognized Croatia as an independent state.

They organized their newly acquired lands, respecting the old Roman administrative solution, into three political entities: White (Western) Croatia, often called Dalmatian Croatia and Red (Southern) Croatia, both under Byzantine rule; and Pannonian Croatia headed by the Avars. Pannonian Croatia was subjected to the rule of the Franks in the 8th century and Dalmatian Croatia followed in the early 9th century, while Red Croatia remained under the rule of the Byzantium, only to temporarily join with the remainder of Croatian lands united in the 10th and 11th centuries. **By accepting Christianity, the Croatians aligned themselves with Western European civilisation and became an integral part of Christendom, while the introduction of the local language (as opposed to Latin) in church ceremonies in the 9th century laid the foundation of what was to become a Croatian Christian culture and strengthened the formation of a national identity.**

VII.-XI. cent.

Their new home placed the Croatians at a very important strategic position, a position where Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Europe meet. The geography of the area, with its numerous rivers and mountains made the land disunited in a geographical, climatical and communicational way – which, of course, affected the general and political development of the Croatian people. Attacks by the Franks, Byzantium, Venice, Bulgarians and other peoples caused certain parts



The letter of pope John VIII to prince Branimir, dated 7 June 879 – the first international recognition of Croatia.

of Croatian land to be at times separate from the central Croatian state. Dalmatian and Pannonian Croatia were united in the first half of the 10th century. In Red Croatia, under Byzantine rule, the princedoms (or duchies) of Neretva Zahumlje, Duklja and Dubrovnik developed, and were part of this united Croatia during the era of strong Croatian rulers, in the 10th and 11th centuries (Zahumlje and Dubrovnik remained part even longer). The territorial unity of Croatian lands in the coming centuries depended largely on the unity of the Croats and their strength, so certain border areas were often outside that whole.

Dalmatian Croatia became fully independent around 850 AD. **This central, "main" Croatian state is called the Kingdom of Croats ("Regnum Chroatorum") in 852. In the reign of Prince Branimir, in 879, pope John VIII, as the universal authority of the age, effectually recognized Croatia as an independent state (independent from both the Franks and the Byzantium). English King Alfred the Great's (871-899) famous description of contemporary Europe states that the Croats bordered with the Bulgarians on the Danube, the Byzantium in the Southeast and the Franks in the West.**

Most of the areas inhabited by the Croats, from the Adriatic to the Drava and Danube rivers and from the Raša in Istria to the Drina and what is now northern Albania were united in a single state only during the reign of the powerful King Tomislav (910-928), covering a surface of around 120 000 square kilometres. **The contemporary Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus claims Croatia could muster 60 000 horsemen and 100 000 foot soldiers, while putting to sea a fleet of 80 bigger ships (sagenas, crewed by 40) and 100 smaller ships with a crew of 10-20. Estimates say that Croatia's population might have been around 2 000 000.** Among King Tomislav's most significant successors in the 11th century are King Petar Krešimir IV (1058-1074) and his heir, King Dmitar Zvoni-



Croatia in the time of rulers from the national dynasty (Trpimir's Croatia, 845-884).

mir (1075-1089). On the occasion of King Dmitar Zvonimir's coronation in Solin in 1075, an emissary of pope Gregory VII handed to Zvonimir the symbols of kingship – sceptre, sword and flag. By that act, the Holy See further backed the sovereignty of the Croatian state, once again proving the stability of the Kingdom's international position. The fact that Croatian troops, with the Normans, reconquered from the Byzantines one of the most important cities of the southeast Adriatic, Dyrrachium in 1082, further bears testimony to the strength of the Kingdom of Croats. This era, from the 7th to the end of the 11th century, is called the era of rulers from the national dynasty.

In time, a Church closely connected to Rome developed in the land of the Croats, foundations of an education system were laid, and the population mixed with the ancient inhabitants of the land, thus receiving a rich cultural and civilisational heritage and becoming part of the Western circle and the Carolingian tradition (especially visible in the construction of sacral buildings, basilicas and smaller churches). Another cultural asset (especially for book copying and illumination) were the Benedictine monasteries, around 50 of them, founded from the 9th to the 11th centuries. The use of glagolitic script and the local language in church and everyday life, as opposed to Latin script and language in formal affairs, goes to show that literacy was already relatively high. Some of the texts thus retained are very important in Croatian history. In the centuries to come, the Croatians would continue to develop their culture and economy with respect to their immediate surroundings.

The death of King Petar Svačić at Gvozd in 1097, painting by Oton Iveković



Croatians in the dynastic and state union with the Hungarians



The state agreement between twelve leading Croatian noblemen and Hungarian King Koloman (1102).

1102.-1526.

Having lost their last ruler from the national dynasty, the Croatians, in accordance with contemporary feudal traditions, signed a treaty called the Pacta Conventa with the Hungarian King Koloman in 1102. In it, the King guaranteed to uphold the laws and preserve the territorial unity of the Croatian Kingdom from the Drava river to the Adriatic. Thus the Croatians and Hungarians took on the same ruler and the Croatian Kingdom entered a personal union with the Hungarian Kingdom, a union in which it remained until 1526.

Even though their international sovereignty was now tied to the Hungarian Kingdom, the Croatians preserved all the markings of their statehood and the social distinctiveness of their Kingdom throughout the duration of the union.

As before, during the time of the first attempts at sovereignty, the Croatian Kingdom remained a target for many neighbouring countries even while united with Hungary. For centuries the Venetians and the Byzantines had tried to gain control over the coastal and eastern parts of the Kingdom. The Serbs, under Byzantine rule until the 13th century, also made numerous attempts (especially towards Dubrovnik) in the period from the 12th to the 14th century. These attacks were the cause of the many wars the Croatians were forced to lead in defence of their land. Especially significant was the Peace of Zadar, signed on February 18, 1358 with the Venetians, forcing them to renounce their claims on the cities and islands of the East Adriatic coast. This document, six centuries after the arrival of the Croatians, reaffirmed the Croatian claim on the lands settled in the

7th century. Only in 1409, exploiting the internal strife within the Hungarian-Croatian state, were the Venetians able to gain control over the East Adriatic.

Three more Croatian states were formed beside Duklja (around the Skadar lake, called Zeta from the 11th century and Montenegro from the 15th) in the South and East of the Croatian Kingdom.

The Bosnian Kingdom was formed in 1377, encompassing the area of what was the administrative district of Bosnia within the Croatian Kingdom and areas belonging to the ancient state of Raša up until the 1373. Its first king, Stjepan Tvrtko I Kotromanić, Ban of Bosnia from 1353, used the political instability of the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom and united under his rule a great part of Dalmatian Croatia, excepting the



The coat of arms of duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić

Croatia in the second half of the 14th century (after the Peace of Zadar in 1358).



cities of Zadar and Dubrovnik, which had remained loyal to Hungarian-Croatian King Sigismund (1387-1437). This new area under his rule made Stjepan Tvrtko call himself "by God's grace king of Raša, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Croatia and the Primorje" in 1390. The possibility of Bosnia becoming the new centre of a free Croatian state was blocked by Stjepan Tvrtko's death in 1391. **The political weakness of the Bosnian Kingdom caused a new state to be formed in its South in 1448 – Herzegovina.**

The Bosnian Kingdom was finally conquered by the Ottoman Turks in a swift war in the spring of 1463, after almost eighty years of systematic pillaging. Herzegovina was conquered in 1482, and both states became administrative districts of the Ottoman Empire.

In the south eastern coastal area of the Kingdom, the Republic of Dubrovnik was formed and through power gained by maritime trade and trading links with neighbouring states, kept its sovereignty until 1808 and the Napoleonic conquest of Europe.

Since 1352 and their success at gaining a foothold in Europe at the Galipoli peninsula, the Ottomans conquered many important cities and regions in the south-eastern Balkan peninsula and relatively soon threatened Croatia itself. These successful wars left the Ottomans with a good base for further operations towards Central and Western Europe. The Bosnian Kingdom was first attacked in 1386, and the Croatian Kingdom in 1391. In the times to come, fighting between the attackers and the Croatians became ever more frequent – after the fall of the Bosnian Kingdom, a line of defence was set up along the rivers of Vrbas, Spreča and the Neretva valley. **Ottoman raids into Croatian lands and further (all the way to Italy and Austria) were a special danger – estimates say that in the period from 1463 to 1516, around 400 000 Croatians were taken into captivity. That was the start of a period of constant hopeless struggle against the powerful Ottomans, a period called the "two centuries of grieving Croatia – plorantis Croatiae saecula duo" (16th and 17th centuries).** In such a difficult time, constantly threatened by the Turks, many Croatians fled their homes and emigrated to Austria (Gradišće), Slovakia, Moravia, Hungary, Furlania, South Italy (Molisse), etc. – and many Croatians still live there. **The Ottomans introduced Orthodox settlers from inland Balkans to the depopulated and conquered areas of the Bosnian and Croatian Kingdoms, thus changing the demographic, religious and cultural outlines of those areas. What remained of Croatian, Catholic inhabitants was systematically repressed and islamicized, especially from the start of the 16th century.**

At the end of the 15th century, the Ottomans seized the Neretva valley and areas east of the river Cetina, broke through the defence lines on the rivers Spreča

in 1512, Cetina in 1513 and Sava in 1521 and continued their conquest of Croatian lands in Srijem, Slavonia, and towards Velebit and the Pounje. In that time, Croatia bore the name “Antemurale Christianitatis – the wall of Christendom” thanks to its constant struggle with the Turks.



The Battle of Mohacs field, 1526.

Croatia under the Habsburg crown

1527.-1918.

After the Czech-Hungarian-Croatian King Ludovik II Jagelović died in battle against the Turks on the field of Mohacs in 1526, his dynasty was extinguished and the Czechs and Hungarians chose archduke Ferdinand of Habsburg as their new king. The Croatians too, after three months of negotiations, chose him "freely and without influence" to be their king at Cetingrad, on January 1, 1527, again after receiving his promise to respect Croatian law and defend the country. Even though the Croatians were often displeased because of the Habsburgs' neglect of their duties towards Croatia, they remained part of the Monarchy until its fall in 1918.

In constant war against the Ottomans, the Croatians lost towns and even entire regions and many were taken into captivity. According to the Venetian historian Sanudo, the Turks had taken around 600 000 Croatians into captivity by the year 1533. To help the war effort, the defensive system of the Croatian Kingdom (the captaincies of Koprivnica, Križevci, Ivanićgrad, Petrinja, Bihać, Slunj and Senj) was exempt from the rule of the Croatian Ban (viceroy) and placed under the direct command of the War Council in Graz. The war continued with changing luck for the Croatians and by 1594 the "once glorious Croatian Kingdom" was down to 16 800 square kilometres – the "reliquiae reliquiarum – remains of remains". Most of the taken areas were liberated in wars led with varying success by Venice (from Dalmatia) and the Habsburg Monarchy in the 17th and 18th centuries, in which most of the fighting was done by Croatian troops. By 1718, Slavonia,



The negotiations at Cetingrad in 1527, painting by Dragutin Weingartner.

Srijem and most of today's border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with Boka Kotorska and the area south of Budva (both in Montenegro today) had been liberated – **so the fighting with the Ottoman Empire played a great role in Croatia losing a good part of its territory, resulting in the Republic of Croatia's present, unnatural shape.**

Like other non-German peoples within the Habsburg Monarchy, the Croatians had been exposed to germanization, absolutism and centralism from the court in Vienna. Attempts by the Croatians, led by the noblemen Krsto Frankapan and Nikola and Petar Zrinski in cooperation with Hungarian nobility to escape Habsburg absolutism resulted in very grave consequences for the entire Croatian people in 1670. When Hungarian nobility responded to this absolutism and germanization again in the first half of the 19th century, they responed with a national programme – a call for a Greater Hungary from Carpathia to the Adriatic. This of course denied the existence and rights of any other nation in that area, so the Croatians were suddenly threatened from that side, too, in the 1830s and 1840s. This conflict culminated in the "spring of nations" in Europe in 1848, which saw numerous "national" revolutions appear as the idea of a sovereign, unified national state took shape as a new ideal. The Croatians had a programme of their own, most importantly asking for Croatian lands to be re-united under the control of the Ban (even though they all formed part of the same Monarchy, Croatia and Slavonia were administratively separate, under the Ban, while the remainder of Croatian lands were controlled by the Impe-



Croatia at the end of the 19th century (in 1883)

rial Council and Government in Vienna) and within the Habsburg Monarchy as a union of equals. When negotiations with the Hungarian leadership regarding Croatian autonomy failed and Hungarian threats became ever more open, Ban Josip Jelačić, commanded by the Croatian Diet (the Sabor) and the Imperial Court took up arms against Hungary in defence of the realm and in the spring of 1848, a Croatian army crossed the Drava river into enemy territory. **When a rebellion broke out in Vienna by the sympathizers of the ideals of Greater Germany and Greater Hungary, Jelačić, along with his own Croatian and other Imperial troops helped stifle it, and then moved on to help defeat the Hungarian liberal government which would not acknowledge the national rights of the Croatians, Serbs, Slovaks, Poles, Romanians and others in lands it considered parts of Hungary.**

In the second part of the 19th century, when modern nations were being created in Europe, the Croatian people were continually exposed to pressures from

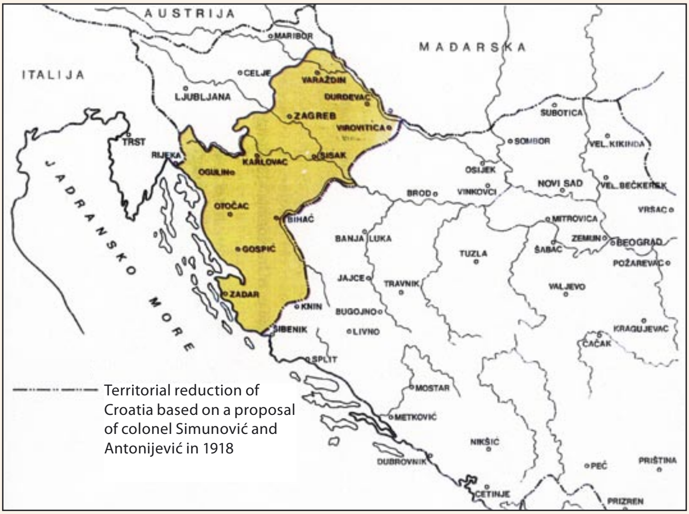
Habsburg absolutism, Hungarian hegemony and the Greater Serbian ideology on its way to forming into a nation. Even though the absolutism of the 1849 constitution struck a blow to national movements throughout the Monarchy and thus also in Croatia, the Croats laid all the foundations (political, cultural, religious and economical) to what was to become the modern Croatian nation under the legendary Ban Josip Jelačić. After the Habsburg Monarchy became a dual monarchy, Austro-Hungary, following the agreement of 1867, Croatia and Slavonia were administratively under Hungary, while Istria and Dalmatia were under Austrian control. The military border (or krajina) was demilitarised and returned to the control of the Ban in 1881. Despite the fact that the agreement between Croatia and Hungary politically recognized the Croatian people, and Croatia retained autonomy through the institution of the Sabor and Ban as head of government, with Croatian as the official language, the Croats were still not free of Hungarian hegemony – especially during Count Karl Khuen-Héderváry's infamous reign as Ban of Croatia (1883-1903), when he used all the non-democratic means at his disposal to strengthen his absolutism. **His preference for Serbs in Croatia came at a time when the idea of a Greater Serbia was being born, an idea which stated that all the Slavic peoples inhabiting the region between Solun, Trieste, and Sent Andrej were – Serbs, and thus had to be united in a single Serbian state which would span this territory. This Greater Serbian programme was very much felt in Croatian political life, going as far as openly calling for a genocidal war against the Croats (1902).**

The First World War thus found the Croatians disunited again, administratively, politically, economically and culturally, and the end of the war and the fall of Austria-Hungary left them open to attempts by Italian imperialism and the Greater Serbian programme.

Monarchist Yugoslavia

While Italian troops were occupying Croatian coastal areas in 1918, following the secret London agreement of 1915, Croatian political life was undergoing a process that contributed to the rash and non-parliamentary admission of the Croats into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929) on December 1, 1918.

So, the Croats, basically deceived by unitarian politicians from Croatia and Serbia into entering an artificial monarchy without tra-



Territorial reduction of Croatia based on a proposal of colonel Simunović and Antonijević in 1918

The Serbian proposal of the border with Croatia (Virovitica – mouth of the Una river – Bihać, west of Knin and Šibenik) laid out in 1918.

dition, found themselves under special attack by the Greater Serbian tyranny of the Karađorđević kings.Throughout the state's existence, unitarian political circles enforced Greater Serbian centralism and Croats, along with other non-Serbian peoples were brutally harassed and used.

The Serbian tyrants used a great amount of violence in pacifying the Croats, even going as far as organising murders of Croatian politicians, Stjepan Radić and others, in 1928 in the Parliament in Belgrade.

1918.-1941.

When Serbian leadership, due to the increasingly complicated balance of power in Europe (most notably the strengthening of the Third Reich) began to cede to Croatian demands for a reorganization of the state to make the Croatian people equal political factors within the Kingdom (resulting in the creation of the Banovina Hrvatska in 1939), Greater Serbian ideologists answered by launching projects like "Krajina" (1939), "Serbs gather!" (1940) and "Homogenous Serbia" (1941) – projects which became the foundation of Greater Serbian action in the Second World War and later, in communist Yugoslavia and the 1990s, when the Croats opted for democracy and national sovereignty.

Banovina Hrvatska, 1939-1941.



In the torrent of the Second World War

When German and allied forces attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, Croatian nationalists, backed by Germany, proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH). Croatia was occupied and divided according to German and Italian interests, with Italy getting control of the vital coastal area, the heart of the medieval Croatian Kingdom and Hungary occupying Međimurje and the Banat. Greater Serbian idealists and Serbian nationalists, called the Chetniks, began attacking and killing Croats, Muslims and other non-Serbs at the outset of the war, so the Croats and Muslims retaliated in vein (through the institutions of the NDH). Yugoslavian communists joined the attacks on the NDH after Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941. Led by Josip Broz Tito, they began their struggle for government and a new Yugoslavian state, organised their own political bodies, organisations and armed forces.

Most of these military and civilian refugees were captured and killed in Slovenia by the Yugoslav army.

1941.-1945.

Being a puppet state to Germany, the NDH instituted similar racial laws against Jews, Gypsies and Serbs, and many were killed (along with political opponents, other Croatians, etc.) in the infamous concentration camp at Jasenovac.

Throughout the war, the Croatian people were divided ideologically, politically and militarily. The war caused a great deal of suffering to all of Croatia's inhabitants and even though Yugoslavian communists heralded the new Yugoslavia as a democratic state of free and equal peoples, they dealt with all real and possible political rivals very harshly in the war – especially in the spring and summer of 1945 when hundreds of thousands of civilians and NDH armed forces fled to Austria to surrender to the Allies. Most were captured and killed in Slovenia by the Yugoslav army, and those that did make it to the Al-

lies were turned down and handed back to the Yugoslav troops. The survivors were sent throughout Yugoslavia in columns of death, all the way to the Romanian, Bulgarian and Greek borders, many of them brutally murdered along the way.

The Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH), 1941-1945.



Communist Yugoslavia

At the end of the Second World War, the Croats and the Federal Republic of Croatia (covering the territory it does today) found themselves in communist Yugoslavia, with formal autonomy and a single party communist system organized similarly to the Stalinist USSR. Nationalization was performed, private property and free market economy were abandoned and all the firms, factories, mines buildings and similar assets were taken away from their owners by expropriation. The totalitarian communist system which had broken with centuries of human tradition caused much dissatisfaction and great suffering, both from "work obligations" and the duty of every individual to surrender his goods to the "people's government". Those who were against communist ideology, or were thought to be, were pursued in many ways, even killed, along with entire families.

Hundreds of thousands of Croats were pursued by the police and the judicial system, many were sentenced to death or long prison punishments.

Although the Croats had taken great part in the fight against fascism in the War, proportionally more so than any other nation within Yugoslavia, their position within the new state was very unfavourable. Hundreds of thousands of Croats were pursued by the police and the judicial system, many were sentenced to death or long prison punishments. In 1966, 1 300 000 Croats had police files. Under such circumstances, many left the country through legal and illegal ways, so by the end of the 60s, one in four Croats lived outside his country. Croatia was also economically exploited in many ways. When Aleksandar Ranković, minister of internal affairs and vice president of the Yugoslavian government was removed from his position, a movement started in Croatia and in other parts of the federation to reform the federation to ensure greater rights for its constituent peoples. This movement was stifled at the

1945.-1991.

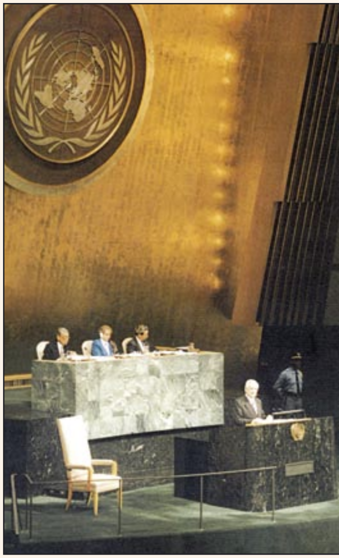


The Socialist Republic of Croatia, in Yugoslavia, 1945-May 1990.

end of 1971 and resulted in trouble for tens of thousands of Croats who had taken part. Many were arrested and sentenced to long times in prison, some were removed from their positions, and some were denied the right to work. One estimate claims around 32 000 people: students, university professors, politicians, writers and others were harassed in many ways, 11 800 were tried and sentenced to prison sentences and prohibitions of further public action. Some estimates say this number is even bigger. Meanwhile, many Croatian emigrants were being hunted and killed throughout the world by Yugoslavian secret police.

The sovereign Republic of Croatia

After the fall of communism throughout Europe at the end of the 1980s, the communist regime in Yugoslavia was to suffer the same fate. **In spring of 1990, after 45 years of communist totalitarianism, the first multiparty elections saw the victory of Franjo Tuđman's Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ). Tuđman's programme offered a sovereign Croatia, market economy, multiparty democracy and the conciliation of ideologically conflicted Croats.** Parliamentarism was reborn in Croatia on 30 May 1990 when the winning democratic parties took their seats in the Sabor. On 22 December 1990 a new, democratic Constitution of the Republic of Croatia was accepted. By it, the Republic of Croatia is a state that accepts political democracy, human and minority rights, free market economy, different forms of ownership and the rule of law. In negotiations about the reform of the still existent Yugoslavia, Croatian leadership backed the idea of a confederation of sovereign states, while Serbian politicians still remained for a firm federation. **In the very tense political atmosphere within Yugoslavia, Croatia held a public referendum about the future on May 19, 1991 where 83.56% of all registered voters turned up, and 94.17% of them voted for a sovereign Croatia.** Based on these results, the Sabor passed a Constitutional declaration of independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia and a Bill of rights of the Serb and other minorities within Croatia on June 25, 1991. A peaceful solution to the Yugoslavian crisis was agreed on at a meeting of ex-Yugoslavian republic presidents at Brijuni on 7 July 1991, attended by emissaries of the European Community. On 8 October 1991, a day after the Yugoslav Air Force bombed the seat of Croatian government and symbol of Croatian statehood, the Banski Dvori (Halls of the Ban), the Sabor severed all political ties with Yugoslavia and declared a sovereign Republic of Croatia. Fighting for international recognition, Croatia was part of the peace conference on

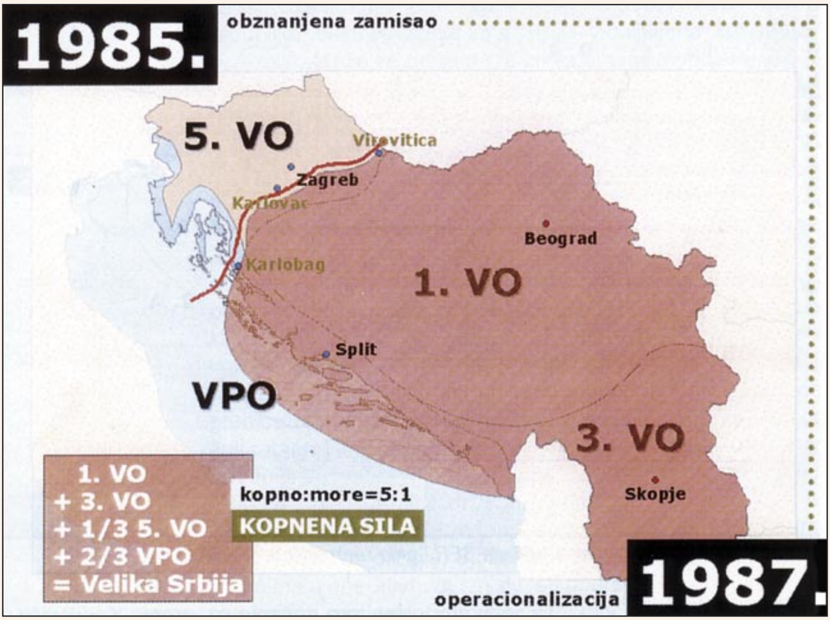


President Franjo Tuđman's speech before the UN General Assembly, following the Republic of Croatia's acceptance into the UN on 22 May 1992.

1991.

Yugoslavia in the Hague, led by lord Carrington from September 1991. An arbitrage commission by the conference, led by Robert Badinter, concluded on 7 December 1991 that the issue was not "separation from Yugoslavia, but its disintegration", and that all ex-Yugoslav republics that wanted to do so, were allowed to form new associations based on the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974. The Vatican recognised the Republic of Croatia on 13 January 1992 and the members of the European Community followed stead two days later, on 15 January. Most other countries recognised Croatia soon after. Croatia was accepted into the UN on 22 May 1992, joined NATO's Partnership for Peace programme some years later and signed a Pact of stabilisation and joining with the European Union. After the EU gave a positive opinion on the readiness of Croatia to become a candidate for the EU, the final processes of integration into NATO and the European Union began.

The Yugoslav People's Army's (Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija – JNA) territorial organisation of Yugoslavia, following the remodelling of 1987.

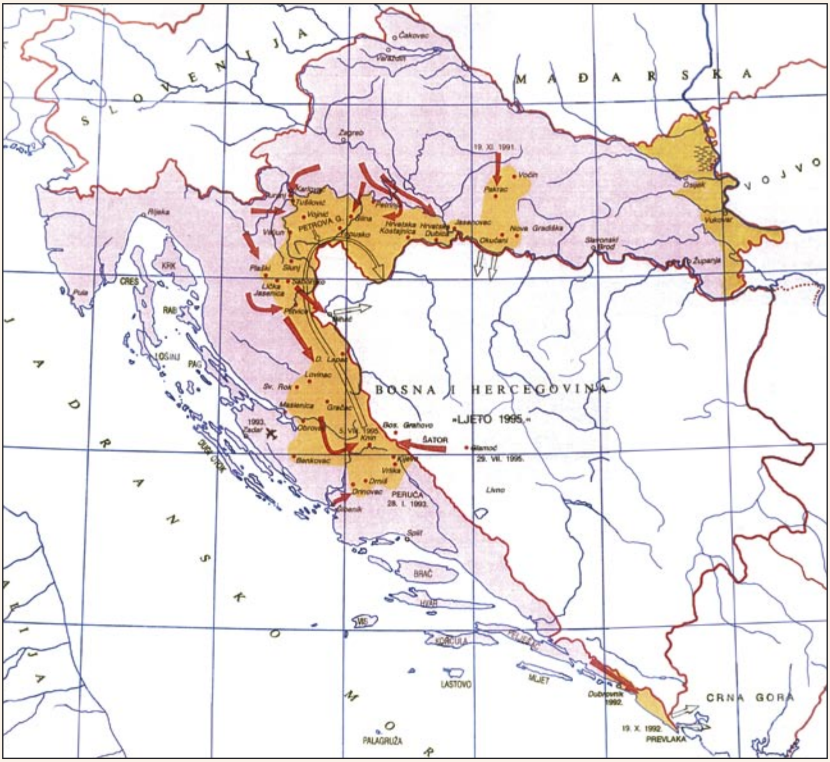


The Homeland War

Democratic Croatia, after difficult times in totalitarian systems, was soon under attack by Greater Serbian imperialist politics through the state institutions of SFR Yugoslavia, SR Serbia and SR Montenegro, different pro-Yugoslavian and Serbian nationalist political organisations. The creators of the Greater Serbian plan had had decades to prepare for its implementation, in communist Yugoslavia. For this reason, the armed forces of Yugoslavia were remodelled and systematically serbianised (1985-1987). The Territorial Defence forces of the republics, previously under their respective command, were subordinated to the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija – JNA) and the People's Federal Defence Secretariat. The serbianisation of the JNA, except for Serbian being the official language, was especially visible in the percentage of officers coming from each nation and showed a gross disproportion considering the size of republics: Serbs 63.2%, Montenegrins 6.2%, Macedonians 6.3%, Croatians 12.6%, Slovenes 2.8%, Muslims 2.4%, Yugoslavians 3.6%, Albanians 0.6%, Hungarians 0.7% and others 1.6%. At the same time, the strategy of the JNA's implementation was completed and the political base was defined (in the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences). The executor of the plan was chosen with Slobodan Milošević's election as president of Serbian communists in 1987.

> **Even though Franjo Tuđman tried to avoid armed conflict in every way and offered different solutions to the crisis, including a confederacy, the Serbs rejected them all, convinced in the strength and superior numbers of the serbianised JNA.**

Even though Franjo Tuđman, leading the Croatian democratic movement towards independence and out of communist dictatorship, tried to avoid armed conflict in every way and offered different solutions to the crisis, including a confederacy, the Serbs rejected them all, convinced in the strength and superior numbers of the serbianised JNA. Serbian fighting, even "armed", first hinted at by Milošević at Gazimestan (Kosovo) on 15 June 1989, began as soon as democratic changes started to take place. By forming parallel institutions like their own "parliament", they organised in August 1990 the so-called "Serbian National Council" and passed a Declaration of autonomy and sovereignty of the Serbian people in Croatia. **They placed barricades on roads around the city of Knin on August 17, organised armed guards at villages and roads and declared a "state of war" in the area of the "krajina". The synchronised operation of the Serb rebels in Croatia and the JNA is visible in the fact that JNA fighter aircraft intercepted and forced to turn back three helicopters of Croatian police sent to reopen the blocked roads around Knin.** The rebels then organised a referen-



The Republic of Croatia, 1991-1995 (liberation and reintegration of occupied areas).

dum on their own autonomy in Croatia and declared a "Serbian autonomous district of Krajina" in the areas of Knin, Obrovac, Benkovac, Gračac, Korenica, Dvor na Uni, Glina, Vojnić and Hrvatska Kostajnica. The so-called Serbian National Council passed a statement of "separation" of the "Krajina" from the Republic of Croatia and a month later a statement of the "joining of Krajina to the republic of Serbia". Other similar decisions were passed later.

At the outbreak of the Serbian rebellion, the Croats were unarmed, without an army, diplomacy and security services – without the basic institutions of a democratic country. They were financially destroyed and Yugoslavia, which they neither could nor wanted to live in any longer, was supported by many powerful countries. Few supported Croatian aspirations towards independence. Serbian propaganda, backed by sympathizing countries, did all it could to portray the Croats in the worst possible light. All the evil that Serbs did to Croats in the brutal aggression of 1991 was placed in the context of retribution for what had happened in the Second World War. Even though the Croatian government pa-

tiently negotiated with them, they, generously supplied with weapons and everything else from Belgrade, continually rejected all Croatian propositions for equality in accordance with international law. In the first half of 1991, their rebellion was spread to most of the areas inhabited by Serbs: Pakrac and Plitvice in March, Borovo Selo in May, etc., killing and forcing to leave all non-Serbs as it progressed. When Croatian police clashed with the terrorists in Pakrac (March 2 and 3), Plitvice (March 31 – when the first Croatian policeman, Josip Jović was killed), Borovo Selo (May 2 – Serbian terrorists ambushed and killed 12 Croatian policemen), and other places, the JNA would interfere and place tanks between the Croatians and Serbs, allegedly to stop the fighting, but in reality to take up strategic positions to occupy Croatian territory. The point of the Serbian plan was to create the illusion that the Croatians were the aggressors (in their own country!) and that the JNA was the defender of the Serbian people. Because of this, the JNA could not act directly, but had to use a strategy of exhausting linked to a conflict of minor to medium intensity, to strengthen the appearance of "spontaneous resistance of the unarmed Serbian people" defending against the "genocidal" Croatians.

In the fall of 1991, the JNA had to leave Croatia, too, and left behind great amounts of weapons and a command staff to the rebels.

After minor clashes with Slovenian Territorial Defence (June 27 – July 7), the JNA's main goals in the spring and summer of 1991 were: to create a military structure within the Serb rebels and to extract the remaining JNA troops from Slovenia. **In the fall of 1991, the JNA had to leave Croatia, too, and left behind great amounts of weapons and a command staff to the rebels. Since the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and local Serbs were to be crucial for the fulfilment of the Greater Serbian plan, most of the JNA forces that left Slovenia and Croatia were deployed there.**

In July 1991, the JNA, in close cooperation with the rebels it had backed, finally began an open aggression on the Republic of Croatia. The operational deployment of armoured-mechanized units of the 12th Novi Sad Corps in Baranja (July 3) and the artillery and missile strike on Erdut in Croatia from Bogojevo, across the Danube (August 3), all qualify as acts of open aggression according to international law. The JNA and rebel Serbs continued their attacks in the Croatian Podunavlje (area around the Danube river), Banovina, Kordun, Lika, northern Dalmatia, western Slavonia and elsewhere. The siege of Vukovar by Serb terrorists and the JNA began on August 24, and stands as a symbol of the disproportion in strength between the Croatian defenders and the aggressors. The JNA intensified actions on all fronts in September and the Pounje was occupied, while southern Croatia was attacked (Konavle, Župa Dubrovačka, Dubrovnik), the coast was blocked from the

sea and the Peruča dam on the Cetina river was taken. As the fierce fighting continued, the UN's Security Council passed resolution 713 on 25 September 1991, starting a "complete embargo on all shipments of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia", including the Croatian people who were forced to fight back the aggressors virtually unarmed. All sides were "invited to settle their conflicts peacefully and through negotiations during the Conference on Yugoslavia". To implement these decisions, the Council decided to employ UN peacekeepers in Croatia and Cyrus Vance (former US foreign secretary) was appointed as the UN's special advisor on Yugoslavia.

The Serbs, however, as before, did not hold to the agreement and continued sporadic heavy shelling of Croatian towns and villages near the lines.

The aggressor blockaded Dubrovnik and Zadar in October; occupied Ilok and bombed the Banski Dvori in Zagreb. In November, on the 18th, after three months of heroic defence, the aggressor took the destroyed city of Vukovar. Defending it, 2000 defenders and civilians were killed, 800 are missing, 3000 ended up in prisoner camps in Serbia, 42 000 citizens were forced to flee and 260 wounded and sick from the city hospital were taken to Ovčara and there executed – this bloody revenge the Serbs accompanied with a song which roughly translates as: "Slobodan (Milošević), send us salad, we are having meat, we are slaughtering Croats". In Škabrnja, Croatian inhabitants were massacred on that day and

The Serbian-Montenegrin attack on Dubrovnik, 1991.



the Maslenica bridge was destroyed, cutting the only land route between southern and northern Croatia. In December, the JNA launched its strongest artillery and missile strike on the ancient city of Dubrovnik (December 6) and 45 Croats were killed in Vočin … Even though the Serbs had occupied more than a quarter of the Republic of Croatia by the autumn of 1991, and severed direct land traffic between the north and south near Zadar (strongly hurting the economy), still they did not achieve the desired border of Virovitica-Karlovac-Karlobag.

By 22 October 1991, around 320 000 Croats and other non-Serbs were forced to leave their homes in the light of Serbian crimes and violence, and only thanks to a strong and resolute will for freedom in its people, was the Republic of Croatia able to stop the enemy. Already in the autumn of 1991, a part of occupied western Slavonia was liberated.

On 23 November 1991, a peace plan known as the Vance plan was agreed on in Geneva that had the UN send peacekeeping troops to Croatia (UNPROFOR) and declared UN protected areas (UNPA). These areas were to be demilitarised and local population was to be protected from all violence. **On that day, 500 000 refugees were registered in Croatia, a number that rose to 700 000 by the end of the year (including refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina). A total ceasefire was signed in Sarajevo on 2 January 1992 with the mediation of the UN emissary Vance, stopping further Croatian liberation operations. The Serbs, however, as before, did not hold to the agreement and continued sporadic heavy shelling of Croatian towns and villages near the lines (attacks from distance were part of a Serbian strategy of "realistic threat"). Serbian artillery attacks on Croatia came from occupied areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, too.**

Even though the UNPROFOR was deployed in occupied areas of Croatia from April 1992, to ensure peace and protect the population, all non-Serbs, some 12 000 people, had been chased away from their homes, around 1000 killed and great damage was done to the economy, cultural heritage and other assets of the Republic of Croatia.

Seeing as the UNPROFOR was not fulfilling its mission, Croatia had to gradually liberate its occupied areas: in 1992, the Miljevci plateau and the Dubrovnik area; in 1993 the Maslenica area, ensuring traffic between the north and south again; the Peruča dam on the Cetina river (which had been mined to threaten the tens of thousands Croatians living downstream); the Medak region (Divoselo, Čitluk, Počitelj), from where the Serbs had shelled Gospić daily. In early May 1995, western Slavonia was completely liberated. Croatians still tried to free the occupied areas peacefully, and **a plan called the Z-4 was offered to the rebels in Knin, guaranteeing Serbian autonomous areas in Croatia – but was rejected. So northern Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun and Banovina were liberated in the military and po-**

lice operation Oluja (Storm) on August 4-7, 1995. By the Zagreb-Erdut accords of 12 November 1995, the area of the Podunavlje was to be peacefully reintegrated into Croatia. This accord was accepted by UN Security Council resolution 1023 (23 November 1995) and the reintegration was successfully completed on 15 January 1998.

The Homeland War saw 12 846 defenders and civilians killed, 32 679 wounded and more than 700 000 forced to flee their homes. Approximately 7600 Croatians went through Serbian camps (64 were in Serbia and 14 in Bosnia-Herzegovina), where 295 were executed. So far, 139 mass graves have been found and 4000 victims exhumed, while the fate of 1214 is still unknown. Further testimony to the brutality of the aggression is the fact that beside many schools, residential areas (217 009 apartments) and factories, 2423 cultural monuments were destroyed, 495 sacral buildings (437 Catholic churches and 22 monasteries) were demolished. The estimated amount of war damage reparations (estimate by the Croatian government in September 1999) is 37.1 billion US dollars.

Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina

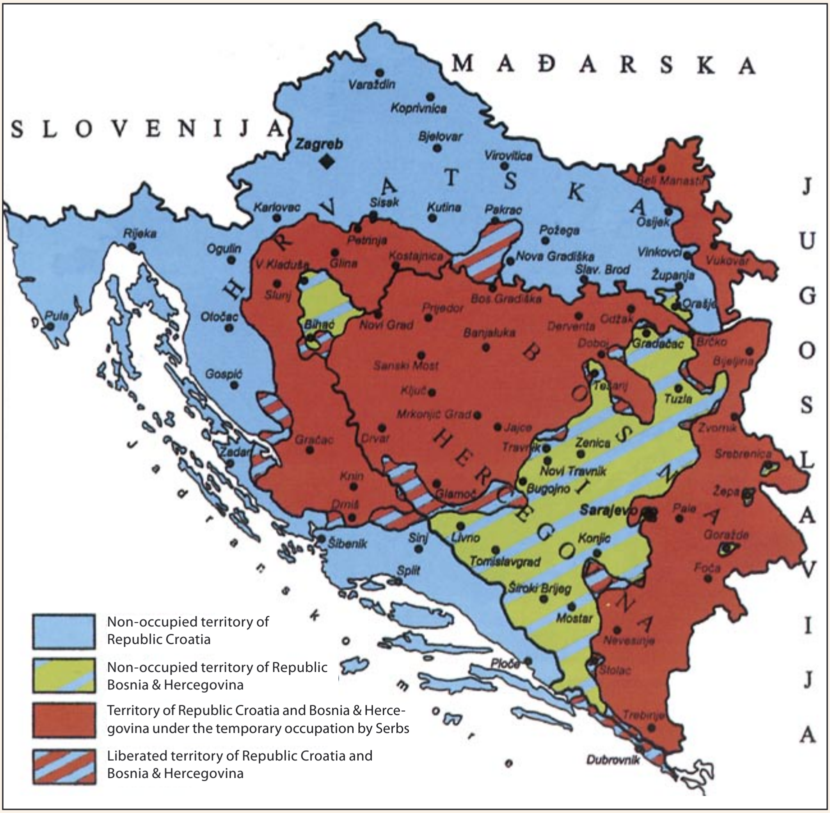
Political pluralism in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina started developing in the summer of 1990: first the Muslims founded the Democratic Action Party (SDA), followed by the Croats founding the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Democratic elections were held near the end of 1990 and representatives of respective peoples were elected to lead Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alija Izetbegović, as the representative of the most numerous people (the Muslims), was elected President of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, while the Croats and Muslims were working on the preservation of Bosnia as a country of three equal peoples, the Serbs were forming their own local government, all in the service of creating a state to reach the desired border of Virovitica-Karlovac-Karlobag. They had the assistance of the JNA, which had deployed in Bos-

So, the Serbian aggression, after failing to achieve its strategic goal in Croatia, spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the beginning of 1992.



The Bosnian-Herzegovian front, autumn of 1993.

1990.-1995.



Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina before Operation Storm (Oluja) in 1995.

nia after leaving a great amount of supplies and military equipment to the rebels in occupied parts of Croatia. So, the Serbian aggression, after failing to achieve its strategic goal in Croatia, spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the beginning of 1992. **The total strength of the JNA in Bosnia in early 1992 was 83 000 soldiers, 460-500 tanks, 400-420 APCs and 950-1000 pieces of artillery, while the number of local Serb volunteers was around 80-120 000 people.** On December 23, 1991, the "Serbian People's Council" in Bosnia, passed a decision of forming a so-called "Serbian Bosnia and Herzegovina" by 14 January 1992 (a day before the EC was to recognize the independence of ex-Yugoslavian republics). The formation of "Serbian Bosnia and Herzegovina" was the de facto start of armed conflict in Bosnia. **The Serbs' goal was to keep the occupied areas of Croatia (with the "help" of the UNPROFOR) and to add to them an occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus reaching the Greater Serbian ideal.**

The Croats in Bosnia, the oldest constituent people in the former Yugoslav republic and now in the sovereign Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had always been strongly connected to Croatia proper, regardless of the centuries of historical division. That is why, when the Serbian aggression on the Republic of Croatia began, they enlisted massively in its defence, either in the armed forces of the Republic of Croatia, or by fighting the aggressor in their own homeland. On May 7 1991, unarmed Croats stopped two battalions of JNA tanks headed for Široki Brijeg in Polog by standing determinedly in front of them. So when the Croats in Bosnia were faced with the same aggressor in the spring of 1992, they, along with their compatriots from abroad (Croatia and elsewhere), engaged themselves in defending their own land.

Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after Operation Storm and the Dayton peace accord (21 March 1996).



At the referendum on the future of Bosnia on 29 February 1992, Muslim and Croatian voters opted for an independent Republic. As the EC and the Republic of Croatia recognised that republic on 7 April 1992, the Serbs responded by declaring the Serbian Republic that same day, boycotting Bosnian state institutions and attacking areas with a Muslim and Croatian population. They placed barricades in Sarajevo (2 March 1992) and rejected Cutiller's plan on the cantonisation of Bosnia (18 March 1992). **Serbian paramilitary units killed many people in Bijeljina, Zvornik, Foča, Prijedor, Višegrad and elsewhere, chasing away Muslim and Croatian population, raping, pillaging and plundering cultural and material goods. They occupied eastern Mostar (3 April), Kupres (9 April), Stolac (10 April), Doboj (3 May), Bosanski Šamac and Brčko (4-7 May), Bosanski Novi and Kalesija (12 May) and Sanski Most (31 May) with the help of the JNA. Sarajevo was completely encircled on 21 April 1992 (a siege lasting until 29 February 1996).** Concentration camps for non-Serbs were opened in Omarska, Karaterm, Brčko, Bijeljina and many other places.

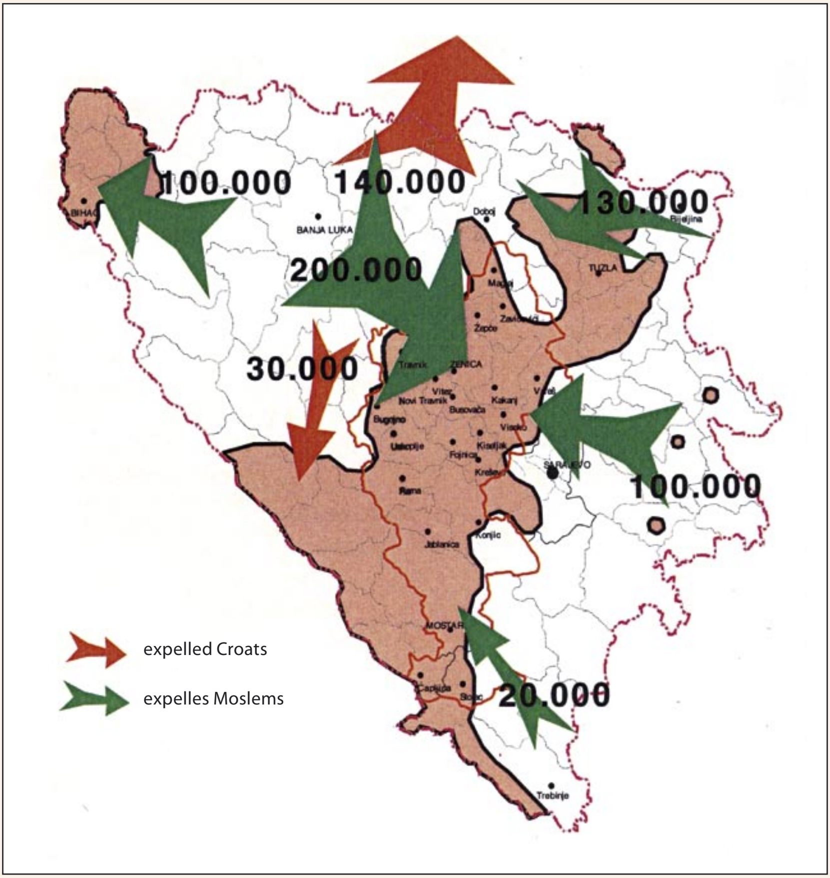
Croatian and Muslim resistance toward the Serbian aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Even though the Muslims were the first to organise their armed forces (the Muslim Defence Council on 10 June 1991, the National Defence Council in June 1991, the secret armed force "the Patriotic League" in September 1991 in 9 areas, with approximately 120 000 people), the Croats were the first to stand up against the Serbian aggression, organized in the Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane – HVO, founded on 8 April 1992). The Muslims called their defence force the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH) on 15 April 1992.

Although outnumbered and outgunned, the Croats stopped the Serbian advance towards Dalmatia.

The Croats were also the first targeted by the aggression – on 1 October 1991 in south eastern Herzegovina and in spring 1992, when the Serbs gathered a strong force in Mostar, Čapljina, Stolac and the Dubrava plain in preparation for a new offensive to finally gain control of the Neretva valley and to link with Croatian Serb rebel forces from Knin in western Herzegovina and southern Dalmatia. Everyday shelling of Croatian villages along the western bank of the Neretva forced the population to flee into the Republic of Croatia, so in those circumstances, the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, a community of areas with Croatian majorities, was formed on 8 April 1992. The HVO was formed, and agreement of Muslim and Croatian leadership allowed the Croatian army (Hrvatska vojska – HV) to operate on Herzegovian territory, to facilitate defence. **Although outnumbered and outgunned, the Croats stopped the Serbian advance towards Dalmatia on the Kupres plain, Duvno, Livno and the Neretva valley. That was the first defeated Serbian attack in the course of the aggression on Bosnia.**

1992.



The displacement of non-Serbian population in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Serbian aggression in 1992.

Soon, Croatian forces started pushing back the enemy in the Neretva valley – from western Mostar to the left bank of the Neretva (25 May), going on to liberate the Neretva valley, Dubrava plain, Stolac and Mostar with full success (6 June). In mid 1992, the difficult battle for Bosanska Posavina was being fought, too and diplomatic requests and threats to Croatia, along with a great superiority of Serbian forces led to the fall of Bosanska Posavina. Bosanski Brod was taken on October 6, 1992. From a military perspective, the reason for the fall of Bosanska Posavina was the disproportion in strength greatly in favour of the Serb attackers.

The Muslim-Croatian conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Greater Serbian politics and the Serbian aggression had compromised the traditionally good relations between the Croats and Muslims in central Bosnia and the Neretva valley, while elsewhere in Bosnia, relations stayed good or at least bearable. Muslim units fought within the HVO, and most of them stayed in the HVO until July 1992 when relations between them started deteriorating. Some of them stayed even after that.



The signing of the Washington agreement (1994).

1992.-1994.

Despite Croatian President Tuđman's proposals to Alija Izetbegović for a united act in the reorganisation of Yugoslavia into a confederacy, Izetbegović was more inclined to follow the Serbian idea of a strong, united Yugoslavia, hoping to gather the 6 000 000 Muslims from Macedonia to Bosnia in a single state. **When the referendum on the future of Bosnia was held, Tuđman appealed to the Croats in Bosnia to answer to it, thus helping secure Bosnia's existence as an independent state. The Republic of Croatia was the first country to recognise the sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina and provided training for the HVO and Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina in bases in Croatia, arming them, providing medical assistance and taking care of hundreds of thousands of Muslim and Croatian refugees.** Tuđman's repeated offers to Izetbegović of a military alliance for a more efficient defence were turned down until 1995 when it became clear that the Croatian-Muslim enclave of Bihać was about to become a new Srebrenica, where Serbs had committed terrible crimes over Muslims in 1995. When Serbian and Montenegrin forces attacked Croats in eastern Herzegovina on October 1, 1991, Bosnian President Izetbegović said: "This is not our war!"

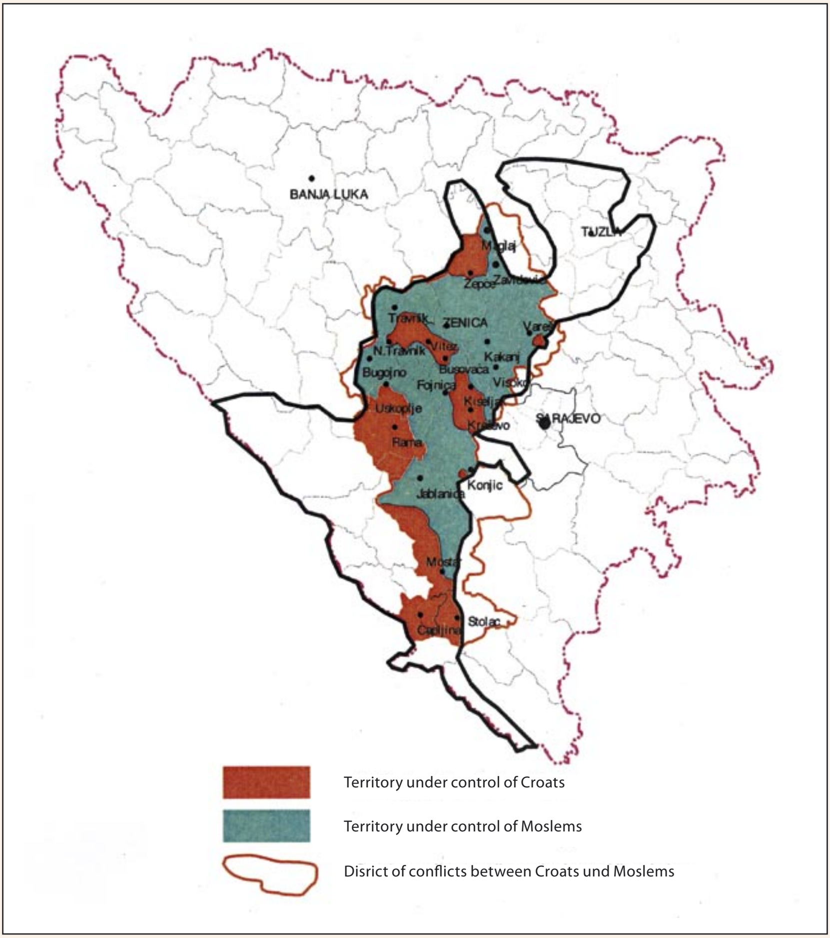
The tensions between the Croats and Muslims escalated around the division of supplies found in JNA storehouses taken by the HVO,

and when the Muslim population of eastern and western Bosnia and eastern Herzegovina was forced to flee and entered central Bosnia and the Neretva valley. This altered the demographic of the area and made the Muslims expand their living space at the expense of the Croats instead of fighting to free the territories they were forced to leave. Sparked by this, the Muslim-Croatian incidents of 1992 turned into Muslim attacks on the Croatian population of central Bosnia and the Neretva valley in 1993. ABiH forces, after isolating HVO units, creating checkpoints on roads and taking up battle positions near key objects, attacked the Croats in central Bosnia on April 16, 1993. **In this conflict, 1041 Croats were killed: old people, women, children, the wounded, etc.; 644 defenders died, 60 persons were raped, 9303 people (mostly Croats) went through the 70 Muslim prisoner camps and 152 950 were forced to flee. What is sad is the fact that many of these crimes were committed in the presence of the UNPROFOR (Ivica Milinović, Zločin s pečatom, 2. prošireno izdanje, Mostar, 2001). Both sides destroyed sacral buildings and property. So in the Serbian aggression and the Croatian-Muslim conflict, altogether 182 Catholic churches, 1024 Muslim places of worship, 27 Serbian Orthodox churches and 5 Jewish synagogues were destroyed. The Muslims had casualties in the conflict with the Croats, but not as numerous and the estimated number of Muslim refugees generated by this fighting is around 50 000.** The armed conflict between the Croats and Muslims was not an all-out war between them, and there are signs that it might have been provoked and directed by certain European secret services, interested in diminishing the Serbian crime in the public eye and showing that "they are all the same". The far more numerous crimes of Muslims over Croats were often ignored by a part of the international public, while Croatian crimes were exaggerated. While the crime of Croats over Muslims in Ahmići, in a military action against a planned ABiH attack (which would have endangered a very important route between Travnik and Busovača and was planned for the morning of April 16), was recorded by many world media and the court in the Hague, the equally serious crime of Muslims over Croats in Trusina near Konjic on the very same day interested no one. The Croatian-Muslim conflict was tragic for both sides.



Meeting between Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and US President Bill Clinton in Washington, 18 March 1994.

Peace between the two sides was signed in Washington on March 18, 1994. General peace negotiations on Bosnia-Herzegovina started on 1 November 1995 in US Air Force base Wright-Petterson near Dayton. After twen-



Control of territory after the Washington agreement (1994).

ty-one days of negotiations, the accord was signed and concluded by a general agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina in Paris on December 14 of the same year. By it, Bosnia-Herzegovina is a single state with two entities – a Serbian entity (covering 49% of Bosnia, even though Serbs comprised only 31% of the population according to the data from 1991) and a federal Muslim-Croatian entity (51%).

Some accusations towards Croats

1.

In blaming Croats for the war, the international public used especially (beside the crime over Muslims in Ahmići and Stupni Dol) the destruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar to portray them in a bad light. During the June Dawns, a HVO operation to free Herzegovina in June 1992, the Serbs destroyed eleven bridges, all the bridges on the Neretva except for the Old Bridge, which they were not able to destroy. Members of the HVO, after securing its perimeter, covered it with thick planks to protect it. However, it was still destroyed near the end of the Croatian-Muslim conflict on November 9, 1993, at 10:16 AM. The bridge was fired on from a tank on the Croatian side. Questions remain, however: why were more than 70 shells fired at the bridge when it could have been destroyed with 3 hits? Why did the firing last hours and why was it filmed by so many cameras? Also, the recordings clearly show that the bridge was not being fired on from only the Croatian side. Even though it is still not known who destroyed the Old Bridge in Mostar, it is clear that its destruction hurt the Croatian side and suited someone, because it happened just as the conflict with the Muslims was calming down.

2.

The behaviour of the British-French quick reaction forces during HV and HVO's operation Summer '95 (25-30 July 1995, with an aim to draw away Serbian forces besieging the Bihać enclave) is also interesting. The Serbs could not stop the operation, but the Quick reaction forces tried to. After their arrival in Bosnia, they kept trying to deploy to the Dinara-Livno front, instead of the Muslim zones immediately threatened by the Serbs. Their deployment and role was solely in the function of stopping the Croatian advance on the Dinara and towards Bihać, to protect the Knin Serbs from further defeat. As their intentions were noticed in time, Croatian and Muslim leadership did not allow their presence on the Dinara, Livno and Kupres front.

3.

The Croats are also accused of starting operation Storm (Oluja, 4-8 August 1995) with the aim of ethnically cleansing the occupied area of Serbs, while forgetting the failed four-year negotiations (very patient from the Croatian side), the failed mission of the UNPROFOR and UNCRO, the threat to the strategic interests of Croatia and Bosnia, the state of occupation of more than a quarter of Croatia (26.5%), the possibility of Bihać meeting the same fate as Srebrenica, where the Serbs killed 7000 Muslims. When the Croats ended Storm with success, the strength of the Croatian

Army and the level of strategic skill displayed in that swift and very modern operation impressed the world. **Serbian analysts wrote after the operation that "time will tell if the decision of the Supreme Command of Krajina on the evacuation of the population and abandoning defence was correct. It is known that after Knin was abandoned, the inhabitants of other towns and villages in Krajina, the entire population in fact, left into an exodus as if commanded to." (Vojska, Beograd, 10 August 1995, p. 7). There are other proofs of this planned exodus that happened even though President Tuđman called on the population to remain in their homes through all media at his disposal. The book Knin fell in Belgrade by Serbian general Milisav Sekulić (Belgrade, 2000) bears special testimony to this, as it contains the order of the "High Council of Defence of the RSK" (no. 12-3113-11959), dated August 4, 1995, about the "evacuation of civilians" according to "plans". Most Serbs acted on that order on August 4 in the afternoon, before the Croatian Army arrived. The US ambassador to Croatia at the time, P. Galbraith, claims the same in his testimony before the court in the Hague.**



Croats beeing expelled from Serb forces after the fall of Vukovar. Expelled from own houses and own properties – before the eyes of the world public and the eyes of United Nations.

4.

Maestral, the joint operation of HV, HVO and ABiH, conducted on 8-15 September 1995 in accordance with the Split agreement between presidents Tuđman and Izetbegović, with the goal of liberating the area around Drvar and Jajce, actually contained two independent operations – one on land and another one in air. That is to say, while the Croatian-Muslim troops advanced over land, a continuing attack of NATO air forces on Serbian anti-air positions was going on. Maestral was successfully completed and left the Serbs with less than 45% of Bosnian territory under occupation – negotiations on ending the war could begin.

Entrance into Banja Luka was possible for Croatian troops (23 km away) during operation Southern Move (October 8-15) from two directions (SW and SE), and accomplishable in less than 48 hours. However, NATO then placed an ultimatum, "either the Croatian forces stop, or they will be targeted for air strikes".

Croatian forces stopped and the "Serbian Republic" was saved, along with Slobodan Milošević.

5.

Did Croatia "divide" Bosnia? Was Croatia the aggressor? The answers to those questions can only be negative. **Croatia saved Bosnia from total Serbian occupation several times. First: politically – the referendum on the future of Bosnia would not have been possible if the Croatian President had not appealed to Croats to vote, and for an independent Bosnia. If they had joined the Serbs in boycotting the referendum, the voting would never have happened. Second: militarily – when Croatian forces stopped Serbian tanks in front of Duvno and on the Livanjsko polje in the spring of 1992. Third: by breaking the blockade of Bihać, in danger of becoming a new Srebrenica (a UNPA supposedly protected by UN troops, where thousands of Muslim civilians were massacred). Fourth: when Croatian forces, working with the ABiH, came within 23 km of Banja Luka in the autumn of 1995, thus making possible the start of peace processes.**

Fifth: by accepting hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees that fled before the Serbs, and remained in Croatia during the Croatian-Muslim conflict (this included members of Alija Izetbegović's closest family).

With incredible bravery, 1500-2000 surrounded Croatian defenders in Vukovar resisted an outnumbering and technically superior enemy – Serbian rebels, Chetniks and the JNA (around 45000-60000 troops and 1000 tanks). The destroyed town was taken on 18 November 1991.



Many world powers had and have their interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina (only Croats are denied this right, apparently) and their armies and intelligence agents were present there. As about the division of Bosnia, beside the improvable and

malicious claim that Tuđman had arranged the division with Milošević (previous points of this text argue clearly against such an arrangement), there are numerous international plans on dividing Bosnia, accepting the results of Serbian ethnic cleansing, genocide and occupation through aggression on Bosnia-Herzegovina (the Cutiller plan of March 1992, the Vance-Owen plan of January 1993, the Owen-Stoltenberg plan of August 1993 – accepted by the Croats under pressure from abroad, resulting in the creation of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia)

Bosina-Herzegovina was divided by Serbian occupation and recognised as such by the international community in the Dayton accord.

6.

The Muslims started turning their backs on their allies, the Croats in 1992. They tried, through staged incidents, to make the Croats attack first. Charles R. Shrader, American military historian, claims that the ABiH had both the motive and the men (and the weapons) to attack the Croats in central Bosnia. And it did attack, following a plan of offensive created earlier. But all was done to portray the Croats as the initiators of the conflict with the Muslims.



Among many other catholic churches, the well known church of the Virgin Mary in Voćin was destroyed by Serbian grenades in the autumn of 1991.

The fact that the first crimes, not mentioning the ones in Rama, were committed by the ABiH in central Bosnia against Croats – the 7th Muslim brigade in the villages of Dusina and Gusti Grab on January 26, 1993.

Also, it is often said that the conflict began after the Bosnian minister had issued an order subordinating units of the ABiH to the HVO Central Command in provinces with a Croatian majority on January 15, 1993, in accordance with the Vance-Owen plan. What is not mentioned is the second part of the order, subordinating units of the HVO to the ABiH Central Command in provinces with a Muslim majority.

7.

The International Court Tribunal in the Hague has indicted many Croatian generals (Ante Gotovina – not available, Janko Bobetko – dead, Rahim Ademi, Ivan Čermak, Mladen Markač; among Bosnian Croats Dario Kordić, Jadranko Prlić, Slobodan Praljak, Bruno Stojić, Valentin Ćorić). The Croats are accused of planned ethnic cleansing of Serbs and taking part in a “criminal venture” allegedly headed by President Tuđman. HVO general Blaškić has been sentenced to 45 years in prison. On the

Serbian side, the main defendant is Slobodan Milošević, and some ABiH generals have been indicted, too. **This court does not consider important the distinction between an aggression and a defensive war, so the attempt at balancing guilt between the attackers and defenders is obvious. Individual serious breaches of international war rules done by some Croatian defenders are being raised to the level of state policy, to balance the guilt for the war against a long planned aggressive policy that had attacked Croatia and Bosnia.** Even in Croatia, some claim that the indictments from the Hague would not be arriving against Croatian generals now if Croatia had processed the crimes at the time. But the facts of the matter are different: according to a Croatian report sent to the Court, Croatia had raised charges against 3978 persons reported to have taken part in crimes during the war; 1949 Croats were found guilty for those charges in Croatian courts, 27 of them for murder, and 13 had been sent to long imprisonments.

Asked by the Croatian left centre coalition government in 2002 of the nature of the operations Flash and Storm, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia wrote on 12 November 2002: "13) Croatian armed forces had had the constitutional obligation to protect the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Croatia and its territorial integrity, as proscribed in § 7, section 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia.

In accordance with that, and in answer to the first question in the Government's Initiative, the Constitutional Court finds the following:

The action of the armed forces of the Republic of Croatia undertaken with the goal of liberating parts of the occupied territory of the Republic of Croatia – including protecting the population from immediate risk for life and preventing the destruction of property as a consequence of armed (military and paramilitary, parapolice and/or terrorist) attacks of occupation troops from occupied territory – was in accordance with their constitutional obligation of defending the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Croatia and its territorial integrity.

In liberating the occupied areas of the Republic of Croatia, the armed forces of the Republic of Croatia acted in the name of and authorized by a sovereign nation and a subject of international law. By liberating the areas of the Republic of Croatia – where an anti-constitutional entity had been formed without democratic legitimacy and international recognition – the armed forces of the Republic of Croatia were fighting an armed rebellion and removing the consequences of an outside armed aggression. They returned national, and by that also international order to the areas, with all the rights, obligations and responsibilities laid before them by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Croatia and the international acts which the Republic of Croatia has accepted and ratified."

Content



Dubrovnik – old town